# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1956

Volume XVII, Number 2 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of January 23, 1956


## 1956 PRODUCTIONS

### Premieres in Other Years

*Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes*


1955 Vol.

| *Stage Play* | *Page* |
|---|---|
| *Bus Stop | 346 |
| *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof | 342 |
| *Chalk Garden (The) | 227 |
| *Damn Yankees | 310 |
| *Desk Set (The) | 234 |
| *Diary of Anne Frank (The) | 257 |
| *Hatful of Rain (A) | 213 |
| *Inherit the Wind | 322 |
| *Janus | 201 |
| *Lark (The) | 206 |
| *Matchmaker (The) | 194 |
| *No Time for Sergeants | 238 |
| *Pipe Dream | 198 |
| *Plain and Fancy | 382 |
| Red Roses for Me | 183 |
| *Righteous Are Bold (The) | 186 |
| *Silk Stockings | 354 |
| *Six Characters in Search of an Author | 189 |
| *Tiger at the Gates | 264 |
| *View From the Bridge (A) | 272 |
| *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? | 246 |

1954 Vol.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Fanny | 256 |
| *Pajama Game (The) | 324 |
| *Witness for the Prosecution | 216 |

1953 Vol.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Teahouse of the August Moon (The) | 254 |


**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 23, 1956*

## 1956 PRODUCTIONS

### Premieres During 1956

*Reviews Appear in This Volume*


| *Stage Play* | *Page* |
|---|---|
| *Fallen Angels | 389 |
| *Great Sebastians (The) | 397 |
| *King Lear | 394 |
| *Tamburlaine the Great | 386 |


*Theatre Openings*

"Tamburlaine the Great"
"Fallen Angels"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 23, 1956*


*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.*

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES



All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.



*Yearly Subscription $25.00*

*Published by* CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

# "Tamburlaine the Great"

**Daily Mirror**
January 20, 1956

***Robert Coleman's THEATRE:***

## Rip-Roaring Drama At Winter Garden

**• Marlowe's "Tamburlaine The Great" fascinating. A visit to see it seems imperative.**

If we've ever had any notions that the plays of William Shakespeare were written by Christopher Marlowe, they were dispelled Thursday evening at the Winter Garden where the Producers Theatre sponsored the first American professional production of Marlowe's "Tamburlaine the Great" by the Festival Company of Stratford, Canada.

The gifted Kit penned the rip-roaring melodrama while earning a degree at Cambridge. He was then but 23. He poured his heart and soul into the work because he was determined that blank verse must oust rhymed verse from the London stage. So it was that he created "the mighty line," which Shakespeare was to use with even more might and majesty.

**TAMBURLAINE** is based on the life of the great Asiatic conqueror, though it takes many liberties with the real saga. Marlowe has the ambitious Scythian bandit become master of much of the known world, only to die from heartbreak, frustration and loss of faith in the Gods.

**His beloved wife has passed on, one of his sons has turned coward, he is surfeited with humbling monarchs, destroying cities and massacreing peoples. He is old and disillusioned. He has gained power and wealth, but lost his soul. Retribution, in the form of a stroke, lays him low.**

Make no mistake about it. Marlowe was a playwright. He knew what the Elizabethans wanted, and gave it to them. He was immensely popular. He was in love with "the mighty line" and used it with reckless abandon. But it was Shakespeare, born the same year, who scaled the heights with blank verse. The Bard also had a sense of characterization and an insight that young Kit lacked.

Tyrone Guthrie and Donald Wolfit fashioned the acting version of "Tamburlaine" that is currently being used for London's Old Vic five years ago. And Guthrie has staged the blood-thirsty thriller with a feeling for pageantry and dramatic effect that is exciting.

**ANTHONY QUAYLE**, director-producer of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, is dynamic in the title role. His make-up is right, his voice and diction admirable, and he has the stature for the demanding part. The cast is huge, and an onrushing deadline prevents our bestowing further individual salutes at this time.

We found "Tamburlaine the Great" fascinating because of its importance in the history of the drama and its sheer vitality. It's rousing theatre. Not Shakespeare, mind you, but perfectly swell Marlowe. Since this may be your only opportunity ever to see this landmark in English literature, a visit to the Winter Garden seems imperative.

**"TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT"**

Melodrama by Christopher Marlowe, adapted by Tyrone Guthrie and Donald Wolfit; staged by Mr. Guthrie; settings and costumes by Leslie Hurry; music by John Gardner; lighting and scenic supervision by Paul Morrison; presented by the Producers Theatre in association with the Stratford Festival Foundation of Canada at the Winter Garden, January 19, 1956. The cast:

| | |
|---|---|
| Prologue | David Gardner |
| Mycetes | Eric House |
| Cosroe | Tony Van Bridge |
| Meander | Robert Goodier |
| Theridamas | Robert Christie |
| Menaphon | Ted Follows |
| Ortygius | Edward K. Holmes |
| Tamburlaine | Anthony Quayle |
| Zenocrate | Barbara Chilcott |
| Agydas | Donald Davis |
| Techelles | William Hutt |
| Usumcasane | William Shatner |
| Scythian Soldier | Peter Wylde |
| A Persian Spy | Peter Perehinczuk |
| A Persian Messenger | Niel Vipond |
| A Scythian Messenger | Julian Flett |
| Anippe | Deborah Cass |
| A Basso | Bruce Swerdfager |
| Bajazeth | Douglas Rain |
| King of Fez | John Hayes |
| King of Morocco | Harry McGirt |
| Zabina | Coral Browne |
| Ebea | Margaret Braidwood |
| Soldan of Egypt | Lloyd Bochner |
| King of Arabia | Roland Bull |
| Philemus | Alan Wilkinson |
| Amyras | Louis Negin |

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun
January 20, 1956

## 'Tamburlaine' Opens At Winter Garden

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It was a dressed-up evening at the Winter Garden last night when the Festival Co. of Stratford, Ont. presented Marlowe's "Tamburlaine."

The audience was largely diplomatic and very distinguished, there were banners all over the house and the Canadian and American national anthems opened the proceedings.

Then came "Tamburlaine," a gory pageant about an early Hitler. He conquered the world, cursed his God and died of a stroke, leaving a couple of lily-livered sons to dissipate his empire.

"Tamburlaine" ought to be proof enough for anybody that Marlowe did not write Shakespeare's plays.

**Plot Comes Slowly.**

In the lengthy chronicle of conquest, there is nary a sign of plot until well into the second half. Out of what seems several million lines, there is hardly one likely quote.

The whole panoramic first act is a series of victories until Tamburlaine beats the Turks. Then the play takes a personal turn, as the captive Emperor is carried around in a cage, against which he knocks his own brains out, and his wife goes mad.

There is a great deal of talk, but not much of it soars.

In the second act the conflict grows a little richer. The Turkish Prince bribes his way to freedom. Tamburlaine takes an oath in blood with his weakling sons. He roars around Babylon in a chariot decorated with skulls and drawn by two kings.

**Dies at Last.**

His queen dies, and he kills one of his coward sons. But in the end he falls dead across the sarcophagus of his dead queen.

"Tamburlaine" is a pageant in the simplest sense of the word, chiefly because the characters are so impersonal. Sadism and spectacle roll by hand in hand. Yet the play does not even have a powerful macabre appeal, for the tortures grow too familiar, and the words are relentless.

Anthony Quayle comes from England as guest star in the title role. He has the stature and voice for the role, and the willingness and art to perform with the grandeur this sort of vehicle needs. His playing of pagan ambition is highly satisfactory. If the tenderness of his love for his wife seems empty, it is a case of actor deserted by words, and not the other way round.

**Another Visitor.**

Also a visiting star is Coral Browne, who plays the tragic Turkish Empress. She gives the play its most touching, human moment with her agony at her husband's death.

Barbara Chilcott is exotically handsome as Tamburlaine's queen.

There are many commendable performances in the enormous cast, often by unidentifiable actors.

## New York Post

January 20, 1956

By Richard Watts Jr.

### Marlowe's 'Tamburlaine the Great'

Since Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine the Great" is one of the most celebrated works in English dramatic literature and is presented professionally only about once every three or four centuries, it is no doubt good for us to have an opportunity to attend upon its gory horrors and its resounding rhetoric. And we are fortunate to be able to see it in so graphic, spectacular and visually impressive a production as that of the Festival Company of Stratford, Canada, which opened last night at the Winter Garden with Anthony Quayle in the title role.

Sadism being fairly popular in entertainment these days, "Tamburlaine the Great" certainly has its share of modern features. Death and destruction are present in wholesale fashion, with a slaying every few minutes, while prisoners bash their heads against cages, captured monarchs in chains pull the conquering Scythian shepherd's chariot, a vanquished king is strung up and filled full of arrows and, as a possible gesture to contemporary squeamishness, the six virgins of Memphis are dragged offstage before being assaulted by the licentious soldiery.

And there is plenty of rhetoric to go with it. Although he was a rather uncouth barbarian, Marlowe's Tamburlaine was not a man at a loss for words, and the play, when it isn't going in for battles and slaughters, is virtually a monologue for its central figure, as he broods with powerful eloquence over power, glory, ambition, fate and other vital matters. The mighty Scythian was, it appears to have been the Elizabethan dramatist's belief, a poet after his own fashion and was making a savage gesture toward beauty in his ravishment of Egypt and Central Asia.

All of this is unquestionably impressive in its verbal splendor, and there is a sullen magnificence in Marlowe's cascading poetry that makes his continued fame as a playwright understandable. But I also suspect that, so far as contemporary audiences go, the fact of his being produced so rarely these days is equally comprehensible. For I believe it is true that both the rhetoric and the bloodshed become strangely monotonous and dull after a fairly short while, and the catalogue of horrors soon begins losing its force.

The chief difficulty, I think, is that, while Tamburlaine is a powerful and impressive symbol of naked force and ruthless power and is presented by the great Elizabethan with turbulent gusto, he is never real nor interesting as a human being. This is one difference between Shakespeare and Marlowe that might be taken into consideration by those who are convinced that they were the same man. Even such monstrous Shakespearean villains as Richard III, Iago and Edmund have a rich humanity about them, but Marlowe's hero is merely a figure of rhetorical impressiveness.

The lengthy title role dominates the proceedings completely, and Mr. Quayle plays it impressively without giving it especial stature. The longest of the minor parts are Coral Browne's agonized wife of a captured monarch and Barbara Chilcott's consort to Tamburlaine. Tyrone Guthrie has staged the amalgamation of the play's two parts with pace and a sure sense of the spectacular, and the sets and costumes by Leslie Hurry and the incidental music by John Gardner add vastly to the great pictorial effectiveness of the production. The evening is a bold and adventurous effort.

## The New York Times

January 20, 1956

# *Theatre: 'Tamburlaine the Great' a Show-Piece*

### Marlowe Play Staged at Winter Garden

By BROOKS ATKINSON

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S "Tamburlaine the Great" made its professional American debut at the Winter Garden last evening, 369 years late.

If Marlowe was waiting for the right director, the delay can be regarded as having been worth while. For Tyrone Guthrie is just the man to revel in the storm, blood and thunder of this mighty show-piece, which was composed out of boyish bravado by a reckless Elizabethan, and written in declamatory verse.

•

Historically, "Tamburlaine" is venerated as the great prelude to the blank verse drama in which Shakespeare triumphed in the next decade. Artistically, it is venerated because it has both the courage and the skill of its own convictions. It tells the grisly and horrifying story of "the scourge and terror of the world"—Tamburlaine, who led his bloody horde through kingdom after kingdom, slaughtering, pillaging, defying God Himself until his excesses overwhelm him.

Marlowe took two full dramas to tell this barbaric tale. Mr. Guthrie and Donald Wolfit have managed to cut it down to the normal size. Even Marlowe is not entitled to more than two-and-one-half hours of American time.

•

"Tamburlaine" is all in one key of violence and bombast. Shakespeare was the man who learned how to turn blank verse into characters and scenes. Although Marlowe did have a "mighty line" he did not know how to vary it, and "Tamburlaine" is tone-deaf in comparison with "King Lear," for example.

Little things like that do not worry Mr. Guthrie. With Anthony Quayle from Stratford-on-Avon, England, in the leading part, with Coral Browne from England as a Turkish empress, with the excellent Shakespeare company from Stratford, Ont., completing the long cast—Mr. Guthrie has plunged into the text with swagger and gusto. There are banners, fanfares, battle scenes, scenes of torture and murder, conquest and cruelty as Tamburlaine leads his gang through lands incarnadined and rides in a chariot piled high with the skulls of the victims.

•

If "Tamburlaine" remains just this side of the egregious, it is because Mr. Guthrie knows when to stop piling Ossa on Pelion. Moreover, the company has a real flair for classical acting on a big scale. It knows how to move in a sweeping style and how to speak verse with resonance, euphony and conviction. Theatregoers who have seen it in its own tent in Ontario during the summer recognize it as the soundest classical company in North America; and it's a pleasure to have a visit here during the winter.

Mr. Quayle and "Tamburlaine" are well matched in Marlowe's prize-ring. The part is bellowing and flamboyant. Made up like an Asiatic tyrant, Mr. Quayle plays with enormous agility and physical prowess, and he spends most of the evening shouting at the top of his voice. But out of the tumult a tangible character appears. An able actor, Mr. Quayle has a big part under control. The excesses are Marlowe's, not his.

•

As Zenocrate, Tamburlaine's wife, Barbara Chilcott, gives a taut performance; softened with mercy when the horde sweeps through her native country, but proud and resolute in the camp of her consort. As the wife of the defeated Emperor of the Turks, Miss Browne makes a deep impression on the story—imperious on the throne, pitiless toward herself when she and her husband become the humiliated captives of the invader.

Since Marlowe was as prodigal with parts as he was with his verse, the cast is a long one that cannot be adequately discussed at this moment. But it includes some able actors who are in thorough command of an extravagant literary medium—Donald Davis, Lloyd Bochner, David Gardner, Eric House, Douglas Rain, to mention those in conspicuous roles.

This "Tamburlaine" comes to us royally caparisoned with rudely powerful scenery and martial costumes by Leslie Hurry. There is a stirring musical score by John Gardner, with some primitive chants calculated to make your blood turn cold.

•

Marlowe and Mr. Guthrie see eye to eye. They have collaborated on a horror play in stormy blank verse and it is a triumphant theatre occasion. Some day the Ontario company may bring us Mr. Guthrie's production of "Oedipus Rex," which is equally brilliant as a production and a finer piece of literature. "Tamburlaine" appeals to Mr. Guthrie's boyish love of excitement. "Oedipus Rex" stimulates his mind and sense of artistry.

Journal American

January 20, 1956

# Production Is Majestic

## Anthony Quayle Heads Vast Cast In Violent Elizabethan Drama

By JOHN McCLAIN

A NEW HIGH in violence and homicide, as well as a thoroughly majestic exercise in production, arrived in our precincts last night in the form of the Stratford, Canada, Festival Company, offering their interpretation of Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine," at the Winter Garden.

This is an extremely ambitious effort, a horrendous and overpowering exploitation of the career of a Tartar shepherd, slightly larcenous, who rises to lead a murderous mob in the conquest of Persia, Turkey, Egypt and various way stations.

Our boy is a delightful 14th Century Capone. He kills and tortures with charming abandon; he takes over the best of the territories he conquers. He has an idyllic love life with the daughter of one of his conquered rulers; other deposed monarchs are required to pull his chariot, and if somebody speaks out of turn he is apt to have his tongue snatched out.

### Quayle Dominant

All this is played by a large and expert company against a series of towering backdrops, oversized tents and other accoutrements designed to give importance to the action. Giant battles are waged in a sort of slow-motion technique, and there is the constant suggestion that the dead and dying are stacked like firewood in the wings.

Tyrone Guthrie, who directs, has moved his minons into classical groups and postures, and the masses ebb and flow unremittingly. Over it all presides the dominant figure of Anthony Quayle, as Tamburlaine, an actor of heroic voice and stature.

The first act is concerned entirely with his successive conquests, the second with his decline and eventual destruction. The play succeeds in creating a brilliant sense of movement and depth, and if at times it becomes repetitious—if one triumph closely parallels the last—it may be forgiven as evidence of Tambulaine's mounting megalomania. You may have seen Errol Flynn kill a lot of Indians, but he is a mild pastel compared to Quayle facing the Persians.

### Declamation Rife

In the competent supporting cast there are worthy performances by Coral Browne, Eric House, Tony Van Bridge, Barbara Chilcott, Douglas Rain and, let's face it, about two dozen others in a cast which must number over 100 players.

Leslie Hurry deserves high plaudits for the scenery and John Gardner for the music, which is carefully integrated into the action of the production.

"Tamburlaine" will not be everyone's cup of hemlock, for as in so many Shakespearean tragedies the subtleties of mood and motivation are lost in the deluge of declamation. But there is no doubt of the brilliance and scope of the production or the commanding authority of Mr. Quayle. The company from Canada has certainly brought us a stupendous and studious evening in the theatre.

---

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 20, 1956

THEATER

# 'Tamburlaine the Great'

By WALTER F. KERR

AS A master theatrical carpenter, Tyrone Guthrie can do anything. He can hang a man by his wrists high in the air and suddenly riddle him with singing arrows. He can find room on the stage for a monstrous dragon-mouthed chariot that is drawn by harnessed kings and driven by a whip-cracking fiend. He can stage a roaring battle in rhythmic slow-motion while empresses watch and insult one another, from perches on step-ladder towers. He can speed a horde of armored actors, their sabers cutting the Oriental air, through an orgy of jaw-breaking, tongue-splitting, and concubine-snatching, and then set them the task of winning another victory while rich choral music pours from their throats.

He cannot, it must be quickly said, make Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine the Great" into a play. As the professors have always insisted, this is a primitive haymaker in which violence is piled upon violence, and corpse upon corpse, to no very purposeful end. Its glory, when it burst upon its first London audience late in the sixteenth century, was the glory of its language, and if it did bequeath to the Elizabethan theater the gift of tongues it did nothing whatever toward organizing its dramaturgy.

The turbulent sprawl remains a sprawl. Tamburlaine snarls his mighty snarl and destroys the King of Persia. Tamburlaine glares a wicked glare beneath heavy, horizontal eyebrows and wipes out the King of Persia's brother. Tamburlaine buckles his armor, strikes his breast, and slaps the Emperor of the Turks into an ironwork cage (where the Emperor of the Turks beats his brains out). When Tamburlaine has children, he playfully wonders which of them is going to be the greatest "scourge."

Because the blood-letting rolls mercilessly on, because Tamburlaine himself betrays no complexity of mind, because spectacular feat follows spectacular feat until the play topples over from its own dizzying weight, Marlowe's nightmare has almost no power to touch us today. Seeing it is simply a matter of paying one's respects to history. It has been done only once since the sixteenth century—professionally, that is—and it isn't likely to be done soon again. This is your chcance to see what drama was like before it was drama.

With that squared away, let's go on to say that in spite of the work's failure to touch a living nerve, you won't be bored. The opulent visual canvas alone will see to that. Leslie Hurry has designed a torchlight production—reds, rusts, and golds flicker vividly against spidery grey tents that might have been imagined by Salvador Dali—in precise harmony with the onrushing mayhem. A cloudburst of banners illuminates every passing conquest, tumbling crowds of extras surge and break and roll into the wings with every tread of the tyrant's foot.

In the center of the storm is Anthony Quayle, brought over from England's Stratford Theater to test his strength against the imposing melange. With drooping Mongol mustache and long black hair curling down the back of his neck, Mr. Quayle saves his outbursts for the second act, letting the Marlovian stops out when he is confronted with the dead body of his adored wife. The rest of the time he is shrewd: using a sly, sometimes almost sotto voce, attack on the greedy lusts of his shepherd-pirate.

On the whole, the performance is a sleek, confident, even rollicking one: it may not sing as magically as one could wish, but its physical energy is unflagging.

Coral Browne, as the maddened wife of an imprisoned victim, finds a few touching gestures in the dazed busines of sending for her jewels as she goes to her death. The remainder of the company has been assembled from the regulars—with, I suspect, quite a few apprentices thrown in—of the Canadian Shakespearean Festival.

It is not so effective here as on its home grounds: voices that are rich and resonant on an open platform stage lose timbre in the high reaches of the Winter Garden proscenium; and director Guthrie would seem to have been more concerned with the vigor of their swordplay than with such nuances of character as Marlowe may have left us. They are both virile and intelligent, though, and the scholars among us must be grateful for the bravado that has brought them to town in "Tamburlaine."

I'm not prepared to settle the controversy over whether or not Shakespeare was Marlowe. As of Thursday evening, one thing was clear: Marlowe was not Shakespeare.

DAILY NEWS

January 20, 1956

# 'Tamburlaine the Great' Bests De Mille as a Roaring Spectacle

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A big, loud melodrama in Technicolor and 3-D, on the widest screen in town, had its opening at the Winter Garden last evening and provided the greatest Canadian uprising this continent ever saw. It wasn't a movie; either, but the production by the Festival Company of Stratford, Ont., of Christopher Marlowe's "Tamburlaine the Great." Cecil B. De Mille had better hurry and put it on film as his masterpiece before he retires.

History tells us that young Marlowe (who was killed in a pre-Third Ave. saloon at the age of 30) wrote the first great Elizabethan drama when he did "Tamburlaine" in two long sections. From it, history figures, young Will Shakespeare learned much about stage poetry and the death of kings. It is the first milepost in the progress of the modern drama, and now New York is seeing it for the first time.

### An Early Dictator

Tyrone Guthrie and Donald Wolfit have trimmed "Tamburlaine" to convenient size and Guthrie has directed it like a roaring riot, with a connoisseur's relish of blood-letting and torture. In the title role Anthony Quayle is giving a performance of truly magnificent size and scope, and 80 or 90 other actors are on hand to help him with his ruckus. I advise you to see the play during its eight weeks here, and if you want to take a nap now and then it will be all right.

Tamburlaine in a way is a prototype of King Lear, in that he is a man who has everything but can't take it with him. He also is a forerunner of Hitler and Mussolini—a cold-blooded conqueror who is broken before he reaches the grave. "A scourge and terror to the world," he proudly calls himself . . . until high blood pressure gives him a thrombosis.

### Poetic Passages

Tamburlaine, an ambitious shepherd, starts out by conquering Persia—although Mr. Quayle and the Canadians never call it Persia: some times they call it Perss-ya and other times Perz-ya, which may be why the country now is called Iran. The time is the 14th Century. Tamburlaine yells and kills his way across the map until he has most of the known world except Europe.

Now and then there are passages of soft, poetic beauty in this play, and Quayle speaks them beautifully. He is, without quibble, a heroic actor, and in his company are such players of quality as Eric House, Barbara Chilcott, Coral Browne and Douglas Rain.

The setting, by Leslie Hurry, is spacious, picturesque and simple, consisting mostly of canopies and tents. The costumes and properties, by the same Mr. Hurry, are superbly imaginative and rich. In these days of austerity in the American theatre we are not apt to see the likes of "Tamburlaine the Great" again in a long, long time.

# "Fallen Angels"

The New York Times

January 18, 1956

## *Theatre: Nancy Walker*

### She Stars in a Revival of 'Fallen Angels'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

NEXT to Beatrice Lillie, Nancy Walker is the funniest woman in the theatre.

Just now, she is trapped in a revival of Noel Coward's "Fallen Angels," which opened at the Playhouse last evening. "Fallen Angels" did not delight the populace when it was new in 1927. During the years, it has become perceptibly more undelightful — thinner, emptier and less wicked.

•

But even if it were written by Congreve, Sheridan and Wilde in collaboration, it would hardly make a good home for Miss Walker. She is no drawing-room comedienne. She is a vaudeville comic. She can destroy a drawing-room comedy just by walking silently across the stage, her shoulders thrust a little forward, her face drawn and sad. Nothing smart or elegant in style has much dignity left once Miss Walker appears on the stage and takes one hopeless look at the properties.

That has certain advantages in some of the scenes in Mr. Coward's play. Her presence is a parody in itself. Her limp distaste for the lines she has to speak is entertaining. "You're a darling" is the sort of line that seethes with hatred when she mutters it. After a remark has been made, she can wait so long before she answers that "yes" seems to be a hilarious word.

The second act of "Fallen Angels" is a prolonged drunk scene between Miss Walker and Margaret Phillips, with Alice Pearce popping in now and then to add a note of comic astonishment to the proceedings. Miss Walker in evening dress. Miss Walker looking frightfully upper-class with a long cigarette holder. Miss Walker getting tangled in the telephone cord and shooting through the door as Miss Phillips unwinds her — is very funny.

Under Charles Bowden's direction, Miss Walker has worked out her part as if it were a revue sketch, with some sleight-of-hand business with the props and sight gags. Even with all this treatment, "Fallen Angels" does not provide an evening of real entertainment. There are times when the original play shows through, and it is awful.

But Miss Walker's general lack of interest in everything that is clever and sophisticated is uproarious. Her pantomime of a hang-over in the last act is painfully funny before a line is spoken. For she radiates comedy. She can swing a slapstick, but she doesn't need anything much except a stage.

That's about all she has to work with in "Fallen Angels." Next to Miss Lillie, she's our funniest female clown.

**"FALLEN ANGELS"**

Comedy by Noel Coward; staged by Charles Bowden; setting and lighting by Eldon Elder; costumes by Patton Campbell; presented by Mr. Bowden and Richard Barr in association with H. Ridgely Bullock Jr. at the Playhouse Theatre, January 17, 1956. The cast:

Julia Starbuck.... Nancy Walker
Frederick Starbuck.....
William Windom
Jasmin Saunders... Alice Pearce
William Danbury.....
William LeMassena
Jane Danbury.. Margaret Phillips
Maurice Duclos.....
Efrem Zimbalist Jr.

DAILY NEWS
January 18, 1956

# Miss Walker's Hangover a Dilly But 'Fallen Angels' Is No Match

By JOHN CHAPMAN

There used to be a way of describing the process of a play which was useful and terse: "The plot thickens." If the plot of Noel Coward's "Fallen Angels," which was revived last evening at the Playhouse, had happened to thicken, I'd be in an utterly cheerful mood right now. As it is, Im only partly cheerful. When I think of Nancy Walker getting drunk or having a hangover I'm happy, but when I think of the play I'm dubious. Sorry to meet you, Mr. Dubious.

"Fallen Angels" was produced here in 1927. It was a farce about two respectable wives who spent most of three acts anticipating the arrival of a Frenchman who had seduced them, one at a time and in different Italian cities, long before their marriages to two nice but dull fellows. It is the same farce now, the only difference being that the locale has been switched from London to New York—and this is not enough of a switch to thicken the plot.

### A Tipsy Lady

In the second act of this new production, Miss Walker and Margaret Phillips get fried on champagne while the maid, Alice Pearce, looks on askance. If you want to take a lesson on how to look askance, just study Miss Pearce. And if you want to become a perfect drunkard (which is unthinkable and naughty) just study Miss Walker as she loads up on the bubbly. Miss Walker is the funniest drunk since Jim Barton did his "mad dog" routine, yet she always maintains the dignity of a true lady. She gets all fouled up in scarves, handkerchiefs and telephone wires without losing her instinct for proper behavior, and her hangover is a triumph of good manners over feeling lousy.

Miss Phillips is a perfect companion for Miss Walker. Walker is dark and chunky and Phillips is blonde and willowy—and Phillips is an excellent actress who knows that the best way to play farce is to play it straight. The second-act binge these two put on is a skillful and funny artifice.

### Funny Lines

Some of Coward's lines are funny, too—particularly the ones which are thrown in without reason. Just to make conversation, for instance, Miss Phillips comes up with, "She ought never to have been burned at the stake because she was such a nice girl." Or another: "The worst of a circus is that I'm always so terrified that they'll mistreat the animals."

"Fallen Angels" has been cheerfully directed by Charles Bowden, and William Windom, William LeMassena and Efrem Zimbalist Jr. impersonate the three men in the plot—two husbands and the old lover—quite agreeably. But I don't think the play is any funnier now than it was in 1927. The records show that it didnt seem to be very funny in 1927.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
January 18, 1956

THEATER

# *'Fallen Angels'*

By WALTER F. KERR

I DON'T know what to say about Noel Coward's play "Fallen Angels," this morning. For one thing, I'm not sure I ever saw it.

What I did see at the Playhouse Tuesday evening was Nancy Walker. Miss Walker slunk into the sunroom of her 1930 New York apartment with her hips rocking back and forth in their impossibly loose sockets, paused to see whether or not her golf-mad husband was listening to her ("Jane and I are going to burn down the apartment today"), discovered that he wasn't, and thereupon took off.

• • •

The course of her flight defies charting. I know that I saw her head for the patio, reverse gears without signaling, and wind up on a piano bench, playing sweetly. I'm pretty sure that she became embroiled with a very nasty telephone cord that somehow or other turned into a catapult and hurled her right through a swinging-door. (She was back in a flash, in fighting trim.) I have memories—dazed memories — of Miss Walker staggering across the stage under the weight of an arm's-length cigarette holder and dousing it in a tinkling fountain, of Miss Walker stirring champagne with a dangling lavalliere, of Miss Walker wrestling with a gold lame stole for a good five minutes before drawing herself up to give a housemaid haughty instructions. I have too many memories, and too little space.

• • •

"Fallen Angels" has more explosive sight gags, more lunatic non sequiturs, more hysterically funny random improvisations than anything since the Marx Brothers, and there were, after all, four of them. All right, let's give Noel Coward a little credit.

In writing this very early, very thin bit of impudence about marital boredom and extra-marital day dreams, he did serve up a few workable situations (the drunk scene, the all-knowing housemaid, the flurry of morning-after explanations) and some airily irrelevant lines ("Please search the marmalade, Jasmine").

Let's allow for the invention of director Charles Bowden, too: Mr. Bowden must surely be responsible for some of the Medea-like postures of his principal comedienne, for some of the weaving, slithering, spell-binding whimsy that makes mincemeat of the plot, the characters, and whatever high-toned 'manner' Mr. Coward may have had in mind.

• • •

What splits the theater in two with the regularity of a trip-hammer is the personal magic of Nancy Walker. Miss Walker has picked up a great tradition where the old clowns dropped it, she has discovered for herself how to make every curl of her lip, every lift of her eyebrow, every tipsy sashay into hostile space a triumph of laughter, how to stand still on a stage and send the house into hysterics just because it is she who is standing there. It should go into the record: Nancy Walker is now a great performer.

The help she gets is bright enough in its edge-of-the-ring way. Margaret Phillips is co-starred, and is worthy of her billing. A very handsome, very willowy, cheerfully elegant girl, she is an excellent and altogether indispensable foil to the morose genius who is having such trouble with the universe.

A walking persimmon named Alice Pearse makes the eternal housemaid—with her profound knowledge of golf, musical tone, and the only right way to prepare gin—a fresh delight. William Windom, William Le Massena, and Efrem Zimbalist Jr. see to it that the stunned males of the piece are crisp and suitably unobtrusive. Eldon Elder's faintly period setting—there's a blue foyer with a chandelier to remind you of a bygone and unlamented decor—is fine.

I hadn't really supposed that the crisp Coward patter would be just the thing for a hearty roustabout like Nancy Walker. There's just no telling. Starting with last evening, I'm prepared to watch her do the full classic repertory: Shaw, Congreve, S. N. Behrman, everybody.

**Daily Mirror**

January 18, 1956

***Robert Coleman's THEATRE:***

# Nancy Walker Rolls 'Em in the Aisles

**• "Fallen Angels" revival opens at the Playhouse. Audience howls with glee.**

A mirthquake shook the Playhouse Tuesday evening, when Nancy Walker and associates moved in with a revival of Noel Coward's "Fallen Angels." It had the posh first-nighters rocking and rolling with glee. We haven't heard such uproarious howls hereabouts since "The Matchmaker" stormed into the Royale.

**NOW, THE COWARD** comedy, which preemed over here back in the 20s, isn't much shakes of a play, but in the hands of the wonderful Walker it takes on all the dimensions of a laugh champ.

**"Fallen Angels" is concerned with a couple of wives, a bit bored with marriage after five years, who look forward eagerly to the arrival here of a romantic Frenchman with whom they have shared gondolas, serenades and sights in Italy before they settled down to domesticity.**

Their friendship is temporarily broken by a jealous quarrel, as they compare their dull spouses with memories of the great lover. In seeking to outwit each other, they get gloriously soused, with rib-shattering results. How does it all end? You'll have to find out at the Playhouse.

**IN OUR BOOK,** Miss Walker is a great comedienne. She knows all the tricks and how to use them all with telling effect. With the lift of an eyebrow, a shrug of the shoulder, a sigh or a fall into a piano, she can provoke gales of unrestrained roars.

Margaret Phillips, of the beautiful diction, has hitherto essayed high comedy and drama. But in this instance she is letting her hair down to match La Walker caper for caper. She sets up the laughs, toiling as if she's been at it all her life, with a dexterity that is delightful. And what timing!

**ALICE PEARCE** is a joy as a resourceful maid, graduate of a remarkable parochial school. She knows her French can correct an errant pianist or tutor a duffer at golf. William Windom, William LeMassena and Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., are excellent representatives of the masculine side.

**Charles Bowden and Richard Barr have given "Fallen Angels" an inspired production, including a satiric setting by Eldon Elder, wacky costumes by Patton Campbell and humorous hats by Mr. John. And Bowden's direction is perfect.**

Nancy Walker is one of the funniest women in the world. A truly magnificent zany. She and her enormously ingratiating colleagues turn Coward's "Fallen Angels" into a riotous romp. The smartest slapstick you're likely to encounter in many a semester.

---

Journal-American

January 18, 1956

# Nancy Saves The Evening

## Miss Walker Paces Good Cast In Revival of Noel Coward Skit

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT SEEMS utterly incredible that anybody, including Noel Coward, would attempt to write a three-act play about two women getting drunk. But that's what Mr. Coward has done in "Fallen Angels," which was revived at The Playhouse last night, and thanks to Nancy Walker, one of the drunks, he very nearly gets away with it.

The fact that it finally runs out of steam and sputters through a lagging third act is due to no fault of Miss Walker's; never have so many stops been pulled to capacity, never before have so many gags been milked to extinction. This girl has the gall and persistence of a Berle: you sit there saying, "Oh, NO—not that old bit!" but you find yourself chuckling as you say it.

### Pure Fluff

The show itself is pure fluff, with less substance than the diaphanous stole Miss Walker toys with during most of the second act: Two married young ladies get word that a French gentleman with whom they both had an affair during their pre-marital days abroad is coming to New York. When their husbands go to Westport for a weekend of golf they plan to ensnare the visitor in an evening of reminiscent sin. The Frenchman doesn't show up and they get violently plastered instead.

This is not a play, but it is certainly a sustained and, many times, extremely hilarious comedy turn. Miss Walker is an expert at contortion, facial and ambulatory; she is adept in the art of the dignified drunk, she can spend excruciating moments trying to disentangle her empty glass from a scarf, she can garble elegant speeches with the exact talent of the over-stimulated. She even manages to get the maximum effect from the simple and familiar business of trussing herself in her own telephone wire.

In all this she is aided by Margaret Phillips, her drinking companion, a young woman endowed with less comedic physical facets but nonetheless an artful foil. There are, of course, the two bromidic husbands, William Windom and William LeMassena, and there is the zany maid played by Alice Pearce, one of my favorites. Her chief chore is to come onstage when Miss Walker is lying in some impossible position or on the brink of a staggering statement. Old idea, but still funny.

Efrem Zimbalist Jr. acquits himself well enough as the lover, who finally shows up midway in the third act, but by that time the thing has degenerated into a hang-over routine and is losing appeal.

We have had a lot of morning-after scenes lately—the scorned breakfast, the sure cure—and this one is not notably superior.

The final tote on "Fallen Angels" indicates that Nancy Walker is certainly one of our funniest ladies, but not even she can stretch a skit into a full evening's entertainment.